



U.S. Department of Justice

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## **PRESS RELEASE**

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### **Nine Indicted on Federal Drug Charges, Accused of Conspiring to Distribute Methamphetamines In Washington Area - Ring Allegedly Had Ties to Mexican Drug Cartel -**

WASHINGTON - Nine people have been indicted on federal charges of conspiring to sell large quantities of crystal methamphetamine in the Washington area, U.S. Attorney Ronald C. Machen Jr., Cathy L. Lanier, Chief of the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD), and John P. Torres, Special Agent in Charge of the Washington Office of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Office of Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) announced today.

The indictments were returned yesterday by a grand jury in U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia. They followed the arrests of eight of the nine defendants in recent days at various locations in Atlanta, Ga. and Winston-Salem, N.C. The ninth person remains at large.

As part of the investigation, authorities also conducted numerous searches on December 10 and December 11, 2010. They seized more than 50 pounds of methamphetamine, six pounds of marijuana, three firearms, and more than \$35,000 in cash in these coordinated law enforcement activities. In addition, five pounds of methamphetamine, one kilogram of cocaine and about five pounds of marijuana were recovered in the weeks leading to the arrests.

According to MPD estimates, the street values of the seized drugs included more than \$3.5 million worth of methamphetamine, \$118,000 of cocaine, and \$49,500 of marijuana.

The defendants allegedly have ties to "La Familia," a Mexican drug cartel that operates in that country and the United States. According to an affidavit in support of the arrest warrants, the cartel is known to distribute large quantities of cocaine, marijuana and crystal methamphetamine.

One of the defendants - Esteban Almontes Rodriguez - is described in the affidavit as a major cocaine and marijuana trafficker and is purported to be the main supplier for the cartel in

the Washington, D.C. area. Another - Alberto Garcia Calderon - is described in the affidavit as the leader of the distribution route into Washington and the supplier of the drugs for Rodriguez.

Rodriguez, Calderon and the other seven defendants were indicted on a charge of conspiracy to distribute and possession with intent to distribute 500 grams or more of methamphetamine, punishable by a minimum of 10 years and a maximum of life in prison. They have been ordered held without bond after court hearings in Georgia and North Carolina.

The defendants will be brought to Washington for future proceedings in U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia.

Rodriguez, 25, most recently of Temple Hills, Md., and Calderon, 36, were among those arrested in Winston-Salem on December 10. Also arrested in that city were Alejandro Quintana Cardenas, 25, and Moises Ramirez-Perez, believed to be 19. In Atlanta, authorities arrested: Alfonso Martinez-Cruz, 39; Jesus Bustos-Penaloza, 52; Felipe Alvarado-Ponce, 36, and Sergio Garcia-Virelas, 24. The ninth defendant is referred to in the indictment only as "Jorge," because his last name is currently unknown.

The investigation was conducted by the Metropolitan Police Department and ICE Homeland Security Investigations. The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Karla-Dee Clark, Vincent Caputy and Nihar Mohanty, of the District of Columbia.

"These arrests and seizures cut off a pipeline for trafficking dangerous narcotics from Mexican drug traffickers into the Washington D.C. area and along the Northeast Corridor," said U.S. Attorney Machen. "Our success in shutting down this operation was the result of rock-solid partnerships among federal and local law enforcement. Together, we will continue to disrupt and dismantle drug trafficking organizations that threaten our community."

"This was an extremely dangerous operation and I applaud the officers from the Metropolitan Police Department's Narcotics and Special Investigations division for their selfless and heroic actions," said Police Chief Lanier. "With the assistance of our Federal Partners, we are happy to send the resounding message that this city will not tolerate the proliferation of drugs, and anyone who tries to do so will be arrested and prosecuted."

"Drug trafficking organizations, like the one just dismantled through our cooperative law enforcement efforts, must be aggressively attacked at all levels - from the street dealer to the international supplier and cartel leaders," said Special Agent in Charge Torres. "Through the coordinated efforts of our federal, state and local law enforcement partners, we have effectively stopped this organization from expanding its market into the Washington, D.C. area."

According to the affidavit, Calderon and others in his organization kept methamphetamine in a home that was being used as a laboratory in the Atlanta area. During a search of that home, authorities found at least 50 pounds of methamphetamine in various states, including crystal and liquid methamphetamine, along with two firearms. Another firearm was found in a search of an apartment in the Atlanta area. About six pounds of marijuana was recovered in a search of an

apartment in Winston-Salem.

The indictment also includes a forfeiture allegation seeking any money or property obtained through the drug conspiracy.

An indictment is merely a formal allegation that a defendant has committed a violation of criminal laws and every defendant is presumed innocent until, and unless, proven guilty.

Numerous agencies provided assistance during the investigation. In Georgia, they included the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) in Atlanta; DEA Task Force Officers from the Fayette County Sheriff's Office; Alpharetta, Ga. Police, Fire and HAZMAT teams; the Georgia State Patrol; the Sandy Springs Police Department; and HSI Task Force officers from the DeKalb County Sheriff's Office, the Cobb County Sheriff's Office, and Marietta and Conyers police departments. In North Carolina, they include the Forsyth County Sheriff's Office, Stokes County Sheriff's Office, and the North Carolina Department of Motor Vehicles, Bureau of License and Theft. The U.S. Attorney's Offices in the Northern District of Georgia and the Middle District of North Carolina also assisted in the investigation and court hearings.

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